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ABSTRACT

Controversy exists concerning whether or not sex discrimination is the norm in Japan and what will happen with the status of Japanese women. One U.S. scholar was surprised after talking to female students at a Japanese college that only a few of them had a view of their future. It is fair to say that Japanese women are not taught to become independent at any educational level. In a 1991 questionnaire, focusing on the educational and occupational aspirations of Japanese women, in which 738 female students of 4-year universities participated, 628 of them responded that they were willing to quit full-time jobs to stay at home when they married or had a first child. Japanese women today are still waiting for something external to change their lives, resulting in their fear of independence. Just as women comprise the majority of students in U.S. colleges and universities, the number of female students in Japanese higher education is increasing. It seems clear, however, that U.S. women are more career oriented, whereas Japanese women are home oriented. Japan's Equal Opportunity Employment Law, which only came into force in 1986, has not yet had a great effect on working women's situations. Preschool teachers should commit themselves to teach in a nonsexist way because of their profound influence in molding a young child's values. The final analysis states that equality will be possible in Japan if both men and women realize that by working together, both at home and at work, a better way of life will be achieved. (BT)

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Some believe that Japanese women are more oppressed than women anywhere else in the world, but others take the opposite view and say that equality of the sexes is more advanced in Japan than the United States and Europe. There is much controversy concerning whether or not sex discrimination is the norm in Japan and what will happen with the status of Japanese women.

Keiko Birat, an American scholar, has stated, "At the age of twenty, Japanese women have not yet discovered the realities of the adult world and respond only to a vague conception of what they are and should be." This comment on Japanese women caused me to rethink about the backwardness of young Japanese women's development in general and academic and social aspirations in particular. Birat lived in Japan for one year and saw the immaturity of Japanese women. In particular, when Birat talked with Japanese female students at a college, she was surprised because only a few of them had a view of their future. It is fair to say that American women at the age of twenty are much more mature than their Japanese counterparts, resulting in more independence financially, emotionally, and socially. It is also fair to say that Japanese women are not taught to become independent in all educational levels, that is, from kindergarten to college. If women are not taught until college to become independent, including gender equality, it is probably too late. Homemaking, for example, used to be the school subject for girls only, and boys would take science or art courses instead. Time has changed the situation in Japan indeed. Today both boys and girls are cooking and sewing together in the homemaking courses in school. Even though the curricu-

that "a woman's place is her kitchen" seems to continue strongly rooted in the Japanese society.

In my survey questionnaire of 1991, which focused on the educational and occupational aspirations of Japanese women, 738 female students of four-year universities responded. Yet, surprisingly enough, 628 of them (85%) answered that they were willing to quit their full-time jobs to stay at home when they were married or had a first child. It would be extremely difficult for the woman to be reemployed on a full-time basis once she left to rear a family. This is a reality in Japan. Like Cinderella, young Japanese women tend to believe that "someday, in some way, they are going to be saved." Thus Japanese women today are still waiting for something external which will change their lives, resulting in their fear of independence. Just as women comprise the majority of students in American colleges and universities, so the number of female students in Japanese colleges and universities is increasing. It seems clear, however, that American women are more career-oriented, whereas Japanese women are more home-oriented. Interestingly enough, Japanese women's attitudes do not greatly change even after obtaining a college education. In addition, American women, who have a desire for both family and career, will try not to give up either one of them. By contrast, Japanese women, who have a desire for both family and career, will try to give up one of them. Statistics reveal that the mother who works, at least on a part-time basis, is a reality in Japan: thus on the conceptual level, the working woman has not yet entered the national consciousness. In Japan the Law of Equal Opportunity in Employment, which did not come into force until 1986, has not yet had a great effect on working women's situations. The woman who does not get married and rear a family is looked upon as a kind of deviant, and women have no real power in the male-centered society of Japan. At the same time, however, Japanese women

are relatively free of the pressures that men usually endure and they seem to be quite content to remain economically dependent on their spouses.

Research shows that a child exhibits a strong gender identity by the age of six or seven. Preschool teachers should commit themselves to teach daily in a nonsexist way because those teachers have a profound influence in molding the values of a young child. The role of preschool teachers may be a more important factor in perpetuating sex-role differentiations than most other factors at school. Further, preschools in Japan should adopt the housekeeping corner of American preschools as a method of teaching the functional components of basic human life. Children are able to learn many things through the housekeeping corner, playing with kitchens and stoves. Parents are also important factors in perpetuating sex-role differentiations. The notion that "men at work and women at home" seems like a historical relic in the United States, and the belief in equality has been a strong effect on the American family. In my recent interview, an American couple, who have two boys and one girl (five, seven, and ten years old, respectively), have emphasized the importance of cooperation in a family and equality in sharing family duties regardless of gender differences. They want their children to realize at the early stage of life that sharing responsibilities is very important in family life. The husband even told me, "Like it or not, cooking or eating is indispensable to survival for individuals. Why is it so bad that boys enjoy cooking?"

Will Japanese women ever achieve equality? As long as they believe the myth, it will be difficult for them to achieve equality. It is said that Japanese women never tried to escape *The Doll's House* and never will. In the final analysis, maybe more equality will be possible in Japan if both men and women realize that by working together, both at home and at work, they can achieve a better way of life for all concerned. After all, half of the population are women.

Notes:

1. Board, K. (1988). *Looking Inward, Looking Outward: Japanese Women Today*. Tokyo, Japan: Sansyusha, p. 5.
2. Inoue, Y. (1991). *The Educational and Occupational Attainment Process for Japanese Women*. Partially published master's thesis. Tokyo Keizai University.
3. Dowling, C. (1981). *The Cinderella Complex*. New York: Pocket Books, p. 4.